

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 433

Introduced by Assembly Member Beall

February 16, 2007

An act to add Sections 18900.1 and 18901.55 to the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to food stamps.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 433, as introduced, Beall. Food Stamp Program: categorical eligibility.

Existing law provides for the Food Stamp Program, under which each county distributes food stamps provided by the federal government to eligible households, and the CalWORKs program, under which each county provides cash assistance and other benefits to qualified low-income families and individuals.

This bill would require the State Department of Social Services to propose a new name for the Food Stamp Program in California, and to convene with a diverse group of stakeholders to develop the new name. The bill would require the new name to reflect one or more designated concepts relating to the operation and significance of the program.

Existing law also provides for the Medi-Cal program, which is administered by the State Department of Health Care Services, pursuant to which medical benefits are provided to public assistance recipients and other low-income persons.

Under existing law, the State Department of Social Services is required to develop a program of categorical eligibility under the Food Stamp Program for persons receiving certain cash assistance for indigent persons.

This bill would require the department to establish a similar categorical eligibility program for recipients of benefits under the Medi-Cal program, when those individuals will be receiving or are eligible to receive benefits or services funded under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. The bill would require the department to establish the program by July 1, 2008, and to fully implement it as to new food stamp applicants by January 1, 2009.

Because counties administer the Food Stamp Program, this bill would increase county duties by potentially extending the period of eligibility for these programs for certain recipients, and would thereby impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to these statutory provisions.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: yes.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

- 1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the
- 2 following:
- 3 (a) Poor nutrition threatens the health of over two million
- 4 California children who are hungry or food insecure.
- 5 (b) According to the United States Department of Agriculture,
- 6 California has the lowest food stamp participation rate in the
- 7 country, with over two million eligible Californians not receiving
- 8 nutrition benefits.
- 9 (c) The average food stamp benefit in California is \$97 a month
- 10 per person. Enrolling these two million eligible Californians in the
- 11 program could result in as much as \$2 billion in federal benefits
- 12 to the state.
- 13 (d) Research shows that federal food stamp benefits help
- 14 farmers, grocers, and the local economy, and have the potential to
- 15 reduce future health costs associated with diet-related diseases.

1 (e) The United States Department of Agriculture reports that
2 over 39 states use an option of expanded categorical eligibility to
3 increase participation and reduce administration in the Food Stamp
4 Program.

5 (f) Many recipients of Medi-Cal in California do not receive
6 food stamps. The state could extend categorical eligibility to cover
7 this Medi-Cal population, to make it easier for recipients to enroll
8 in the Food Stamp Program.

9 (g) The strategies contained in this act will improve health,
10 remove administrative barriers, and increase the amount federal
11 nutrition resources coming to California.

12 (h) The Food Stamp Program has undergone changes over the
13 past several years, including all of the following:

14 (1) Benefits are now delivered by an electronic benefit card,
15 and have not been provided in the form of stamps for many
16 decades.

17 (2) The majority of food stamp recipient households do not
18 receive cash assistance, and are headed by working adults.

19 (3) There is growing interest in using food stamp benefits to
20 support healthy food purchases by low-income people to reduce
21 the incidence of obesity.

22 (i) Many low-income Californians view the food stamp program
23 as a “welfare” program and not a health and nutrition program. As
24 a result, participation in the program is reduced.

25 (j) Given all these changes to the program, the program’s
26 perception, the program problems, and the need to connect the
27 program to health and agriculture, the time is right for a new name
28 for the Food Stamp Program in California.

29 SEC. 2. Section 18900.1 is added to the Welfare and
30 Institutions Code, to read:

31 18900.1. (a) The State Department of Social Services shall
32 propose a new name for the Food Stamp Program in California,
33 by July 1, 2008. The department shall convene stakeholders to
34 develop the new name, as provided in subdivision (b). The new
35 name shall reflect one or more of the following concepts:

36 (1) That food stamps are no longer delivered by stamps.

37 (2) That food stamps support healthy living.

38 (3) That food stamps are important to agriculture in California.

39 (4) That food stamps would be better viewed as a health and
40 nutrition program than as a welfare program.

(b) The department shall convene a diverse group of stakeholders to develop the new name, including representatives from agencies working to improve health and reduce diet-related illnesses.

(c) The department is encouraged to test the impact the new name would have on improving the perception of the program among low-income residents, and on increasing program participation.

SEC. 3. Section 18901.55 is added to the Welfare and Institutions Code, to read:

18901.55. (a) The department shall establish a program of categorical eligibility for food stamps, in accordance with subdivision (a) of Section 5 of the federal Food Stamp Act (7 U.S.C. Sec. 2014(a)), and implementing regulations, for any individual receiving medical assistance under Chapter 7 (commencing with Section 14000) of Part 3 when the individual is a member of a household that will be receiving or is eligible to receive specified benefits or services, such as a referral form, funded by the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant, as provided in Part A (commencing with Section 401) of Title IV of the federal Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 601 et seq.). The program may include other applicants for food stamps, but shall include only those households eligible for benefits equal to or greater than the minimum federal food stamp benefit.

(b) The director shall implement the program established pursuant to this section only with the appropriate federal authorization, and if implementation would not result in the loss of federal financial participation.

(c) The program authorized by this section shall be established no later than July 1, 2008, and shall be fully implemented as to new applicants for food stamps by January 1, 2009. Thereafter, counties shall make reasonable efforts to review existing Medi-Cal cases to identify individuals who could benefit from the program of categorical eligibility. Nothing shall preclude a county from undertaking these reviews prior to January 1, 2009.

SEC. 4. If the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made

- 1 pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division
- 2 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.

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